



Commissioner Morrissey's Quarterly Quote:

The sun is finally shining, the temperatures are up and the Red Sox are ahead in the baseball standings—all indicators that Spring will soon turn into Summer. This time of year also marks the closing of the state's fiscal year. Given that the Autism Division is completing its first official year, this issue of the DMR/ASD Updates Newsletter will provide reports and highlights on some of the programs coordinated by the Autism Support Centers and funded through the Division. Each Autism Support Center provided a brief summary of one of their programs held this past fiscal year. This newsletter will also give an update on some of our broader community initiatives.

Highlights of Autism Support Center Activities:

TILL & BFA (Boston) have held a social/sensory gym program since January and it will run until June at the Tobin Center in Roxbury. The gym center offers an extensive amount of athletic equipment and sensory items.

While children and their siblings gain sensory input through these activities and social interactions, parents are encouraged to network and seek guidance with behavioral and sensory integration techniques from a Behavioral Resource Specialist and an Occupational Therapist.

Community Resources for People with Autism (Easthampton) reported on their Sibshop Program. The program held monthly on Saturdays featured 5-8 year olds in the morning session and a later time for older sibs.

Our focus with the younger group was to build rapport and introduce some discussion about having a sibling with autism spectrum disorder. We played some cooperative group games, made brownies and painted flower pots in which to plant pansies. Toward the end of the session, while we were wrapping up snack, Aunt Blabby dropped in on our group to ask for advice. She is a (fictional) newspaper reporter who needs assistance from the Sibshop participants in answering letters she's received from other kids who have siblings with disabilities. This activity generated some great discussion and allowed kids to identify similarities and differences in their relationships with their sibs. **"It felt good to be with other kids who have brothers and sisters with autism; we did so many fun things I didn't want it to end - I can't wait for the next Sibshop."** -

Family Autism Center (Westwood) reported on their joint venture with the **New England Sports Academy** in a program called Progress. The program is designed to help children with autism spectrum disorders experience the benefits of movement through the use of tumbling exercises, obstacle courses and ball sports. The activities focused on developing self-awareness, confidence and motor skills. The program also promotes social interaction with peers. 25 children participated, ages 3-17. Families came from Canton, Dedham, Dover, Walpole, Mansfield, Medfield, Newton, Norwood, Quincy, Stoughton, Wakefield, Waltham, Wellesley and Westwood.



Autism Center of Central MA (W. Boylston) held a series of family fun days over April Vacation for children with ASD and their sibs ages 9 months - 17 years old:

April 14th: **Nature's Classroom.** Field explorations, a picnic and bottle rocket workshop.

April 17th : **Camp Eyrie.** A science program and a cookout.

April 18th: **The Ecotarium.** A nature program.

April 19: **Whitins Community Center.** A gym and swim day.

April 20: **Friends and Family Movie.** A movie followed by kite flying and a picnic at Wachusett Reservoir.

April 21: **Cogshall Park.** A puppet show, picnic, hike, feeding ducks and bubbles.

Program Kudos:

"Thank you, so much for putting so much time and effort into this program. I hope it will be available again."

A parent about the My Gym Program-Natick

"This is the best day of my life."

"I didn't have any friends until I came to Fun Groups."

Participants in Fun Groups, at CAR-Swansea

"Yesterday when I was driving (my son) back from my husband's work. (My son) was initiating a two-sided conversation with his younger brother (also on the spectrum)...When we got home, he welcomed (his brother) into the office to play computer games. He was inviting (his brother) to take turns with him!"

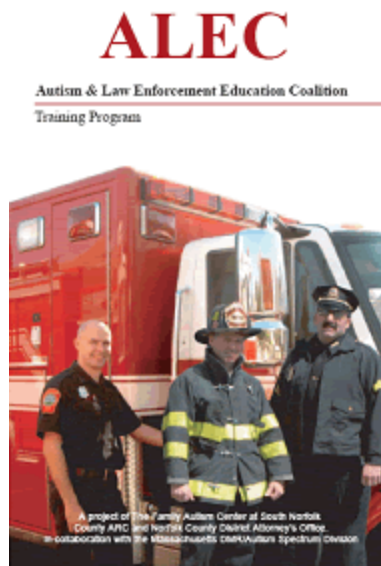
—Parent from Haverhill whose son participated in On Q, a social skills program

Community Based Initiatives:

The First Responder Training Initiative is moving ahead thanks to the ongoing efforts of Bill Cannata, the statewide coordinator of the ALEC program. Bill has introduced the ALEC Model—a train-the-trainer approach using first responders who have a connection to an individual on the autism spectrum to teach other first responders—to each of the seven regional Autism Support Centers.

Over 500 emergency personnel have been trained to date with more trainings of police, fire and EMTs scheduled.

The creation of the ALEC brochure is complete (cover shown) thanks to District Attorney Bill Keating's Office and staff at the SNCARC. For more on ALEC, contact Bill Cannata at 781-762-4001 ext. 4002



For information about DMR's Autism Division please contact:
Cariann Harsh
Cariann.Harsh@state.ma.us
or 617-624-7769

To reach the Autism Support Centers:

Community Resources
(Western MA): 413.529.2428

Autism Resource Center
(Central MA): 508.595.9101

Autism Alliance of MetroWest:
508.652.9900

The Family Autism Center:
(Norfolk County): 781.762.4001

TILL/Boston Families:
(Boston & Metro): 781.302.4600

Community Autism Resources:
(Southeast): 508.379.0371

Autism Support Center
(Northeast): 978.777.9135

"I believe as a group we provided a rich tapestry of information and perspectives on the importance and "do-ability" of developmental screening in primary care, as well as highlighted autism, which has had much to do with the timeliness of this kind of screening."
—Dr. Robin Adair, Developmental Pediatrician at UMASS and Conference Chairperson

Pediatrician Awareness Project: On May 24th, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Office of Continuing Education and the UMASS Medical School Department of Pediatrics hosted "Early Childhood Screening for Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities: A Course for Primary Care Providers." Over eighty primary care providers participated, including physicians, nurse practitioners and nurses. Keynote Speakers included **Dr. Paul Dworkin**, Professor and Chair of Pediatrics at UCONN's School of Medicine and **Dr. Frank Volkmar**, Professor of Child Psychiatry at Yale University. Recipients learned about various developmental screening tools and how the use of these tools can actually be implemented into a busy primary care practice. The Autism Division helped fund the various screening materials for participants. DPH-EI, DEEC and the DOE joined DMR's Autism Division in describing their different state services.

Highlights of Autism Support Center Activities: (Continued)

Autism Alliance of MetroWest (AAMW) worked with My Gym on a Vacation Camp. Ten Children attended the camp from ages 4 - 10 and the children had various ASD diagnoses. According to the program report, campers had the opportunity to explore their physical skills. Gymnastics, non competitive games and relays provided new and challenging sensory and movement experiences that were fun and engaging.

By the end of the week the instructors observed that the children indeed had developed friendships and were feeling good about their individual experiences.

Community Autism Resources (Swansea):

Survivor Island was an integrated theme based camp organized around learning centers with a range of various, developmentally appropriate activities provided to meet the needs of all the children—those who presented with greater challenges as well as those who were more capable, including typically developing brothers and sisters. One of our most popular centers, or "islands" as we named them, included a volcano construction site that required cooperative effort from small groups of children working together. Here children built and painted volcano models together, and finally, as a finale to the day, and much to their delight, erupted them, using lots of baking soda and vinegar!

The Autism Support Center (Danvers) reports on their On Q program: Children with ASD often do not recognize social and emotional cues in their environment. They need direct instruction to master these skills. ON Q consists of 10 children, including typical peers, with a 1:2.5 staff to student ratio. The program utilizes components of Floor Time, ABA, RDI, and Skillstreaming to make learning fun. Several sessions were held this past fiscal year and to date, 36 kids have attended – 4 girls and 32 boys.